



*"Providing Professional Guidance for Business Growth"*

## August 3, 2015

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### **Spotlight on Success – GeoGraph LLC**



Earl McDowell Jr.'s company, GeoGraph LLC, is one of only two minority-owned businesses within its market niche in Illinois. That niche is developing customized geographic profiles via a geographic information system (GIS). A GIS is a system designed to capture, store, manipulate, analyze, manage and present all types of spatial or geographic data.

"Geography is fun," said McDowell. "It's a wonderful time to be in the field. GIS modeling brings surveying, engineering and other disciplines together to map, track and analyze specific information a client is seeking." GeoGraph has been McDowell's full-time venture for two years. His clients have included Ameren Corp., the cities of East St. Louis and O'Fallon, Illinois and the village of Washington Park.

The entrepreneur and SIU Carbondale graduate says Metro East Small Business Development Center Small Business Specialist Jo Ann May armed him with the connections and resources he needed to put his business on the map, so to speak. "SBDC has been a huge resource for me," said McDowell, whose company is headquartered in O'Fallon, Illinois.

"I attended the Metro East SBDC's 'Make a Connection' workshop last fall. It was there that I had the opportunity to shake hands and talk with several key executives at Central Management Services (CMS), the division of the Illinois Department of Human Services that oversees government contracts." He went on to say, "Jo Ann introduced me to Paul Cerpa, deputy director of CMS, who was an absolutely critical connection for my company."

Prior to connecting with the SBDC and Cerpa, McDowell had tried to gain certification as a Minority Business Enterprise (MBE) with the state of Illinois, but to no avail. "When I had the opportunity to speak with Mr. Cerpa, he was already familiar with my file," McDowell said. "At the SBDC workshop, he gave me detailed instructions as to how to modify my application so I could resubmit it.

"Within two weeks of resubmitting, my application was approved. That opened the door to a number of public sector projects and contributed to the significant growth of my business." The SBDC also assisted McDowell in qualifying for Illinois' Small Business Set-Aside Program. The program reserves certain types of contracts for which only small businesses can compete.

"Jo Ann was incredibly persistent and professional," said McDowell, whose experience includes work in utility mapping, fiber-optic mapping and work in the homeland defense industry. "When I approached the SBDC, I was just trying to create and sustain business. The Metro East SBDC has helped me take GeoGraph to a whole new level."

The SBDC also introduced McDowell to Justine PETERSEN, a nonprofit organization that offers free guidance in establishing credit, improving credit scores and accessing capital. "Thanks to Jo Ann, I've been a recipient of Justine PETERSEN's microloans to help me expand my company," he said.

May says clients like McDowell are ideal to assist because they work hard and readily apply the expertise given to them. "Earl has definitely been working hard," May said. "The network of resources our office has provided GeoGraph has given him the opportunity to move forward at an even faster pace. My fulfillment comes from arming our clients with the necessary tools to achieve success."

-This article was [featured](#) in the St. Louis American.

## **SBDC's In The News - Center at GSU Helps Minorities Launch Businesses**



This article appeared recently in the Chicago Citizens Newspaper. [CLICK HERE](#) to go view the full article.

Karen Williams and Priscilla Cordero, director of the Illinois Small Business Development Center, Governors State University, talk to business owners about an outreach center at Governors State University after a Chatham Business Association meeting in Chicago.

Minorities seeking help to launch new businesses can get free assistance from an outreach center at Governors State University in University Park, Ill., the head of the center said.

"Small business owners are missing out if they don't take advantage our resource center," said Priscilla Cordero, director of the Illinois Small Business Development Center at the college, 1 University Parkway in University Park.

Cordero met with several South Side business owners Tuesday at the Chatham Business Association's (CBA) monthly meeting, held at the QBG Foundation/Chicago Citizen

Newspaper headquarters, 806 E. 78th St. in Chicago. Through the college's small business development and international trade centers, the resource center offers access to the school's faculty and staff, who can provide advice and assistance, Cordero said.

The center helps with business plans, marketing, social media use, lending advice and industry reports. The center also provides a list of lawyers and accountants who can help small businesses. So far, the resource center has provided advice to 223 people this year. About 30 percent of the clients were African American. The center also provides advice to existing small businesses. At the CBA meeting, Cordero also gave tips on getting loans from banks and keeping good credit.

For more information on the resource center, call 708-534-4929.

### **Advocacy Launches New Blog**

The Office of Advocacy has launched its newly redesigned blog which can be found at <https://advocacysba.sites.usa.gov>.

The new blog has a more modern aesthetic designed to deliver Advocacy news and information in a more effective and user-friendly manner. Advocacy also aims to engage readers in a dialogue by offering the ability to post comments on articles. Advocacy's blog features a variety of articles on small business topics, including regulatory updates, economic reports, and regional news.

Please visit the new blog at <https://advocacysba.sites.usa.gov> and be sure to update your browser bookmarks with our new web address.

### **Maximizing Neoserra – View Intake Requests on eCenter**

Please remember to check intake requests on eCenter for people looking for business assistance. To find these intake requests:

1. View
2. Intake requests
3. You can then filter for date ranges

For more information see the Neoserra FAQ.

### **Valued Resources – Top Tips for a Better Night's Sleep and Increased Work Productivity**

There are plenty of different ways to increase your productivity, for sure, but one of the best you might not have considered seriously is your nightly rest. For an article on how to get better rest and therefore maximizing your productivity in the office, click [this](#).

### **IESBGA Update - Save the Date - May 25-27, 2016**

Save the Dates - - The 2016 Illinois Entrepreneurship and Small Business Growth Association Annual Conference will be held at the State Farm Hall of Business on the campus of Illinois State University in Normal on May 25-27, 2016. Please Save the Dates.

### **Network News and Moves**

Effective August 1<sup>st</sup>, Annette Fulgenzi has been promoted to the position of program manager for the Small Business Environmental Assistance Program. Annette has extensive experience and expertise working with environmental regulations and assisting small businesses with compliance issues through education and one on one business advice.

Please join us in congratulating Annette on her new position. Congratulations, Annette. We know you will experience tremendous success in your new role.

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The **WEEKLY CONNECTION** is distributed by the Illinois SBDC and DCEO Office of Entrepreneurship, Innovation & Technology each Monday to members of the DCEO Illinois SBDC Network to provide the service delivery partners with regular updates on small business issues, opportunities and resources. You may send any information to share with the Illinois SBDC Network to [Tom.Becker@illinois.gov](mailto:Tom.Becker@illinois.gov). Please feel free to forward this update to other interested resource providers and key stakeholders.

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